

Mayor cuts ribbon at Little Village park

US EPA RECORDS CENTER REGION 5



496926



SHOW CAPTION x

1 / 10

By **Stephanie K. Baer**,
Chicago Tribune

DECEMBER 14, 2014, 3:30 PM

A top the site of a former coal plant in Little Village, dozens of young children climbed over a green and blue jungle gym and explored the grounds of the neighborhood's first and only park during a ribbon-cutting Sunday.

Tentatively called La Villita, or Little Village, the 22-acre park at 2800 S. Sacramento Ave. is built on top of a 3-foot stone cap on what used to be the contaminated Celotex industrial site in Little Village.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel said the new park is the city's largest brownfield conversion to date, now serving as a safe place to play for nearly 6,000 neighborhood children ages 6 and younger, he said. A brownfield refers to the reuse of potentially polluted property.

"Prior to today, (these kids had) no green space," Emanuel said at the ceremony. "Let's open up this park so these kids can get a great future."

The park includes two artificial turf soccer fields, two basketball courts, a skate park and room for two baseball fields. It also features a playground with a small rock-climbing wall, rope jungle and alligator water slide.

Ald. George Cardenas, whose 12th Ward includes the new park, called the opening "a triumph" for the residents.

"This community is being transformed literally," Cardenas said.

Providing what officials have called much-needed green space in the densely populated Latino neighborhood, the new \$11 million park is the biggest one to open in the city this year. Though Maggie Daley Park, which opened Saturday, spans 25 acres, most of it doesn't open until the spring.

Echoing Cardenas, Antonio Lopez, executive director of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization called the park a community victory.

"When our community comes together ... and work with (local officials) for what they want, organize themselves and make a difference and build a healthier community like we see here in this park, that's an environmental justice and we need to celebrate that," he said.

Javier Sosa, a parent of four kids under age 10, said he was happy about the park opening up in his neighborhood.

"We needed it," said Sosa, 43. "It's going to be nice. There's a lot of kids around here."

But whether the park would remain a safe place to play was a concern for Kathy Gomez, 31, a mother of three.

"It's not a good place because of the gang bangers," Gomez said, adding that she plans to take her kids to the park everyday in the summer "if they don't mess it up by then."

"How long is it going to last?" she said.

Chicago Park District CEO Michael Kelly said security cameras will be installed at the park in the spring to ensure children's safety.

"This entire park will have cameras," Kelly said, though he was not sure on how many there would be or how much it would cost. "Whatever it takes to cover the entire park."

The Chicago Park District's board has given preliminary approval to the proposed name, La Villita. The board will consider the name for final approval early next year, Kelly said.

"This park has been on our minds for a long time," he said. "To finally get this done was really special."

sbaer@tribpub.com

Twitter @skbaer

Copyright © 2014, Chicago Tribune

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Next Big Thing in High-Tech Stock to Watch
VentureCapital News

5 Health Problems Caused by Drinking Too Much Alcohol
Remedy Health

4 Things You Should Never Buy at Trader Joe's
Reviewed.com

Anna Rawson Shows You How to Hit a Power Draw with a Driver
Golf Digest

15 Of The Rarest (And Most Mind Blowing) Photographs In History
LOLWOT

Jennifer Lawrence's Beverly Hills Extravaganza
LonnyMag

